Settings and Features to Consider (1/15/2018)

In other handouts, I will deal with a number of applications where the internal settings affect how something operates. This write-up provides a summary of many items in several areas that can lead to better performance. Although some of these reflect my opinion, I have done a lot of web searching to substantiate the position I am presenting. Modern computers are very complex and sometimes the default settings that come from the factory are not totally suited for smooth, efficient or user-friendly operation for the average user.

Also, this write-up started out to be all about changing and improving settings, it has expanded to include some Windows Features that can be very useful.

The Control Panel was always the primary way to change settings until Windows 10 was released. The Control Panel still exists in Win 10 but is harder to find. The settings area (gear icon revealed by a left click of the Start Button) is where Window 10 wants you to make changes. If you choose to use the Control Panel it will, in some instances for Win 10, lead you into the settings area.

Control Panel and Settings in Windows 10

The Windows Control Panel is the giant dash board of your computer. There are a number of settings here that can have significant impact on the operation of your machine. You get to the Control Panel in Win 7 by left clicking the start button and then clicking (left) on the words Control Panel. In Win 8 you get here by exposing the Charms and then going to the Settings Charm and clicking on Control Panel at the top. In Win 10 you right click the start button, click on the word Run and then type "Control Panel" in the run field.

Once there, I would change the way the Control Panel is displayed. By default it is in Category View. Personally, I find it more user-friendly in Large or Small Icons View. Below are some of the Control Panel entries and what they do. Remember, in Windows 10, some of these things will take you into the settings area. Although I am listing the things below in the Control Panel, I have parenthetically noted where they are in the settings section. Remember in Windows 10, click on the start button and then click on the gear to reveal 13 icons under settings. If settings shows fewer than 13 icons you have not run the latest update of Windows 10. In that case, go to the Update & Security icon and click on check for updates.

If you have difficulty finding a particular area under Settings, there is a search window at the top that says "Find a setting" in it. Type what you are looking for and it will take you there.

Personalization (Also Personalization in Settings) - This is where you can change (or personalize) your background (wallpaper). This is also where you can decide on a screen saver and the timing of that screen saver. Most importantly this is where you can change the resolution setting that determines how big items appear on the screen. A good middle-of-the-road setting is 1024 by 768 if you have a regular monitor or 1280 by 800 if you have a wide screen. Lower numbers in the resolution setting show pictures and fonts larger. Higher numbers yield a finer grid, so things will appear smaller.
You can put your favorite digital picture, or scanned image, as a desktop background. The easiest way to do this is to open the picture, right click it and choose "Set as Desktop Background" from the menu.

Programs and Features (Apps in Settings, sub heading Apps and Features) - This gives a list of all programs that are properly installed your computer. This is also where you go to correctly uninstall them. Uninstall is different from delete in that all references to a program or update are taken out – usually including desktop icons. In settings, left click an entry to reveal an uninstall button.

Default Programs (Apps, sub heading Default Apps) First let's talk about file types. Most files have a three or four character extension. Examples follow:
.exe is an executable file or program. Sometimes referred to as an Application. Makes something happen.
.doc is a Word document (**.docx** in Word 2007 and later)
.xls is an Excel file (**.xlsx** in Excel 2007 and later)
.jpg (.jpeg) is a digital picture. Stands for **J**oint **P**hotographic **E**xperts **G**roup (That's today's trivia)
.pdf stand for Portable Document Format is read by Adobe Acrobat reader. (Often used for forms). Think: IRS.
.bmp is a bit map – another format for digital picture.
.txt is a text file
There is a list in your computer that associates a file type with a program. You reveal this list by clicking on "Choose default app by file type". This association is the default program that opens the file or tries to open it. There are a number of programs, for example, that can open and process pictures. You can use this default list to make the connection between pictures and the program you are comfortable using. Also if you do not have

MS Word and you don't want to buy it, you can make the connection between a Word file type (.doc or .docx) and another program such a Microsoft Works or Open Office.

   If you are working in the Control Panel and choose Default Programs and then pick Associate a file type with a program, this is one of the areas where Windows 10 automatically takes you to settings. The procedure is roughly the same. Find the phrase at the bottom that says "Choose default apps by file type" and click it. If you want to change the app, left click on the current default program and it will give you choices.

Windows Firewall (Network and Internet, Status) - Turn off if you have a router in your house (a router provides a hardware firewall). Leave on when no router is present. Since Windows has a firewall, there is no need for another one from an outside vendor. Too many firewalls turned on can spell trouble. Commercial virus checkers, such as Norton, include a firewall.

Power Options (System, Power and Sleep) - More important for laptops than for desktops. This is where you go to determine when your monitor actually goes black and your disk stops spinning. Shorter times should be used with a laptop running on the battery in order to preserve battery power.

User Accounts (Accounts) - This is where you can change the spelling of the user names or make them more personalized. The picture that is associated with the name can be changed here. Starting with the Vista version of Windows, it is here, under User Accounts that you can choose to TURN OFF User Account Control (UAC).   This will cause the insidious, annoying, paranoid warning message to stop coming up. In my opinion, these warnings become so irritating that they become useless. You will be willing to agree to anything you are warned about. Even though Windows recommends that you leave it on, many people are happier with it off. In Windows 7, 8 &10, User Account Control is a variable, vertical slider. Moving it to the lowest level stops the message. Even in Win 10 User Account Control is revealed through the old Control Panel. Typing "User account control" in the settings search field in Win 10 takes you to the old Control Panel window. Make the change there.

   It is also under Accounts where you can add or remove a password needed when a machine wakes up from sleep (sub heading, sign-in options).

   Also try typing "netplwiz" in run field for 7, 8 & 10. That will allow you to pre-enter the password required when machine is first powered up.

Mouse (Devices, Mouse) – This is where you can change the way your mouse behaves. It is also here that you can alter the symbols that the pointer uses. An arrow is default. You can make it a hand or a seashell or a dinosaur or any number of other pictures. If your mouse moves too swiftly, this is where you slow it down.

Sounds (Devices, Bluetooth and other devices)– This is where you can associate computer actions with certain sounds. When you turn your computer on a musical crescendo is played. There are many other sounds connected with other computer actions. You can change these if you like. They can even be made into custom sounds.

System (System, About) – This is where the specifications for the computer can be found. This includes the amount of RAM, the Operating System and other relevant facts.

Devices and Printers (Devices, Printers and scanners) - This is the area where you can check to see which printers your computer recognizes. It is also where you can add a printer. If you are having a problem with a printer not working, check here to see if there are any jobs queued up to print. If you see a printer icon in this section and there is a non-zero number next to it, this indicates that a document is waiting to print. If that print failed, your printer is out of commission until that job is cleared. It is sort of like putting a rock in a funnel – nothing gets through until the rock is removed.

Network and Sharing Center (Network and Internet, Status) – Although setting up a network is beyond the scope of this write-up these are the Control Panel entries where you would make appropriate changes. Networking several computers in the same household could be a topic for future meetings.

Desktop Gadgets – A neat feature in Win 7 that lets you put things on your desktop such as a calendar, an analog clock, weather forecasts etc. Double click this icon and do a little playing. Not there in Windows 10.

Date and Time (Time and Language, date and time) – This is where you can change the time zone your computer resides in or adjust the time or date. If you live in AZ it is important you say "Arizona Time Zone" instead of "Mountain Time Zone". Arizona does not observe Daylight Saving Time (nor does Hawaii). The computer will automatically make that change unless you tell it that you are in an area that doesn't observe it. Access to date and time can also be accessed by Right clicking the clock in the lower right hand corner.

(Trivia Fact: all computers, including desktops have a small, 3V battery (about the size of a quarter) in them that permits the computer to remember the date and time even when the machine is turned off. I'll bet you were wondering about how this was done. This battery typically outlives your machine, but if it does die, you will lose the date (not data) and time every time you turn the computer off. This can create a multitude of problems.)

Folder Options (Can be handled in File Explorer) - Changes the way files and folders are shown in Windows (File) Explorer. Use the view tab to show the extensions of known file types. This makes for easier file management.

Caveat – there are so many settings that can be accessed through the Settings Area or the Control Panel, that you must be careful not to change things that you don't totally understand. Some strange behavior can result. Also be a little bit careful of all the "experts" in the world who want to change your settings. If you let guests/friends/kids who are in your house mess with your Computer's Settings, it could be disastrous.

Configuration Utility

The boot or startup instructions of your computer are found in the Microsoft Configuration Utility. You gain access to this by right clicking the Start Button, Clicking Run and then typing MSCONFIG in the Open box that appears. If your computer is new, or never been "tuned up" the Normal Radio Button will be chosen. This is really not what you want, because when this is chosen, every program that is listed under the Startup Tab will be initiated at boot time. Change this to Selective Startup and then click the Startup Tab.

In Win 8 &10 the Task Manager replaces the start up portion of MSCONFIG. Use Ctrl+Shift+Esc to get to the Task Manager where you can make changes to the start up activity in your machine. If you actually run MSCONFIG in Win 8 & 10 it will refer you to the Task Manager. Sometimes I wonder why Microsoft changes things that were so familiar.

Now the fun part. In Win 7 everything that is checked in the startup list starts at boot time. If this list is really long (and it gets bigger the longer you have had your computer), it is advantageous to UNcheck some of these items. The trick is to know which ones to change. Remember that unchecking them will not delete or uninstall the item, but rather will just prevent it from starting at boot time - thereby saving you some resources. Web searches can yield explanations of just about every item you can come across. Type the letters from the first column of the utility listing into the box on that website and see what it tells you. Uncheck things that are not necessary. After going through the whole list, hit Apply and then Close and restart your computer. This will make the changes take effect. You may get a message on restart that says you are using Selective Startup. Check the box that says "don't show me this again" and then click OK. Notice there will likely be fewer items in the System Tray (the string of icons that appear in the lower right hand corner of your screen, next to the clock). The System Tray reflects many, but not all, things that are running in the background.

In Win 8 & 10 there are no checked boxes. Instead there are lines with the words Enabled/Disabled - you need to disable things you don't want to start at boot time. There is also a reference on each line indicating the impact that the item has on startup.

Start Menu and Task Bar

It is possible to change the appearance of the Task Bar and Start Menu. Right click anywhere on the Bar and it will produce a menu. The most important items on this menu are the first, Toolbars, and the last Properties. Toolbars give you a fly-out menu that lets you turn several things on/off. Having the Quick Launch menu on is useful. It gives you a group of icons in the lower left corner that can always be seen and that can be used to launch an application with a single click. This list can be changed by dragging icons on and off. In Win 7 the equivalent of the Quick Launch Menu is achieved by "pinning" icons to the task bar.

The Properties entry lets you alter the way the start menu looks and also change things that appear in the Start fly-up menu. It also lets you lock the Bar and/or automatically hide it.

If you want the task bar at the top or side of the screen, simply point at the bar and click and drag it to where you'd like it to appear. Occasionally the bar is moved (perhaps by accident). This click and drag procedure can be used to put it back at the bottom. The bar must be Unlocked in order to move it.

Remember there is NO start button in Win 8 - but the task bar is still there. You can get to similar information using the search Charm. Put the mouse in the upper right corner of the screen and choose the top Charm. I

have not experimented with it, but there are a number of third-party providers that offer a free program that will put the familiar start button back in Win 8. Probably a good idea if you were really used to it.

Keyboard Shortcuts

There are often several ways to do the same thing on a computer. Some "Mouse-a-phobes" (I made that term up) would rather use the keyboard if they can - versus using the mouse. Here are a few keyboard shortcuts that can be useful. First find the key marked with the Windows Logo. This is, coincidently, called the Windows Key. Holding it down and hitting certain letter keys cause things to happen.

Win – hitting this button alone opens the Windows Menu
Win (hold it down in Win 7) - reveals the on-screen keyboard
Win+E – Opens Windows Explorer - called File Explorer in Win 8 and 10
Win+F – Opens the Search (Find) box to look through File Explorer
Win+M – Minimizes ALL open windows   Win+Shift+M – Reverses the Minimize procedure
Win+R – Opens the Run Box
Win+X - (Windows 8 & 10 only) gives you access to a start menu of sorts.
Win+D - takes you to the Desktop
Ctrl+Shift+Esc - Takes you directly to the Task Manager. This is a useful device for closing a page or pop-up that does not respond to the 'x'.

There are MANY, MANY shortcuts. Trying to list them all is way beyond the scope of this document. Type "keyboard shortcuts" into Google and you will get extensive lists. Here are a few more that can be handy.

Ctrl+Alt+Del – sometimes called the three fingered salute which accesses a control menu (not control panel).
Ctrl+C – Copies highlighted text and puts it on the clipboard (C stand for Copy)
Ctrl+X – Cuts highlighted text and puts it on the clipboard (Think of the X as a pair of scissors = Cut)
Ctrl+V – Pastes from the clipboard to location of cursor (Think of the V as standing for Velcro = Paste)
Ctrl+A – Highlights everything in a list (A stands for All)
Alt+Tab – permits you to toggle between open windows
Ctrl+F (F stands for Find) – Opens a window to let you search for text on a given document or page.
F1 – Opens a help file
F3 – Allows for searching on an Internet Page (Same as Ctrl+F)
F5 – Refreshes the screen. Especially useful for Internet Pages.

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Disclaimer - This is meant to be a representative list and therefore not all inclusive. If you get to an area you are not sure of or that you want to know something more about, Google it. Type a question-like phrase into the Google Search Engine and you'll be pleasantly surprised at what you can learn.

Also with so many versions of Windows in use, and with Microsoft's propensity to change things (IMO for no apparent reason) I may have overlooked or failed to describe correctly some idiosyncrasy of some version of Windows. I certainly didn't do that willingly and it brings up my suggestion earlier of - when in doubt, "Google it".